

4CD Research Briefs

Contra Costa Community
College District

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Assessing student food and housing needs

In the Fall semester of 2016 the Contra Costa Community College District participated in the HOPE Survey, an instrument developed by the University of Wisconsin's Hope Lab to investigate the prevalence of food and housing insecurity experienced by

that they had episodes of homelessness in the previous year. The survey also discovered that roughly two-thirds of students struggle to pay for food, with one in five reporting they had experienced prolonged hunger within the previous month.

“Contra Costa Community College District students appear to be experiencing elevated levels of material hardship with regard to their very basic food and housing needs”

students attending America's community colleges. The survey was conducted at 70 community colleges nationwide including seven California Community Colleges, our three colleges among them. The [findings](#), generated from roughly 33,000 student across 24 states, revealed that that nearly half of all the students surveyed were experiencing some form of housing insecurity, with 14% indicating

The preliminary findings for our District indicate that our students are experiencing roughly equal levels of housing insecurity relative to the national benchmarks. In our District 49.2% of student respondents (N = 730) reported experiencing some form of housing insecurity in 2016. The Hope Survey defines housing insecurity as having been unable to pay either rent or utilities during 2016, having

Findings Summary

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Prevalence of Housing Insecurity:

CCC = 58.7%

DVC = 42.7%

LMC = 59.3%

District-wide = 49.2%

Prevalence of Food Insecurity:

CCC = 64.0%

DVC = 50.7%

LMC = 58.1%

District-wide = 54.7%

been forced to move two or more times or being forced to “double up” with friends due to financial challenges. The prevalence of homeless districtwide was 14% (roughly 1 in 7 students). Homelessness was defined as having been evicted from their home, stayed in a shelter, lived in an abandoned building or having “no place to sleep” for at least one night.

Not surprisingly, there was some variation in these figures across the three colleges. The prevalence of housing insecurity reported by students was 58.7% for CCC, 42.7% for DVC, and 59.3% for LMC. The degree of homelessness reported was 16.4% for CCC, 14.7% for DVC, and 10.8% for LMC.

With regard to levels of food insecurity, 54.7% of 4CD students surveyed experienced “low” or “very low” levels of food security for some period during 2016. The scaling of this measure was based on an algorithm developed by the USDA derived from responses to six questions related to respondent’s ability to purchase food and exposure to periods of hunger. The corresponding figures for the three colleges are 64% for CCC, 50.7% for DVC, and 58.1% for LMC.

The survey also captured respondent demographic information, revealing some striking variations by student groups. District-wide African-American students are 47% more likely to meet the conditions for housing insecurity and 69% more likely to have experienced homelessness. Black students are also 40% more likely to experience very low levels of food security. Students between the ages 21 and 25 are 44% more likely to have been homeless and 29% more likely to experience deep levels of food insecurity. It is worth noting, however, that there are variations in the experiences of these same student ethnicity and age group populations across the three colleges. That information and a more detailed analysis of demographic data is forthcoming.

This survey represent 4CD’s first ever investigation into the housing and nutrition challenges of our students - and the findings are quite sobering. We need to bear in mind that this national study did not result from a fully randomized survey and therefore we must interpret these findings with some caution and pursue further investigation. That having been said, the 4CD findings are

largely consistent with national and state averages which all suggest that the degree of material hardship experienced by our students is rather severe. Furthermore, research indicates that these hardships directly influence student learning capacity and the effort that they can devote to college course work, compromising their chances to earn a credential or reach their academic goals.

We are in the process of assembling a more comprehensive list of support services to be posted on the District Webpage (link forthcoming).

For convenience here is a short list of food and housing resources that are available to our students:

The Food Bank of Contra Costa County: www.foodbankccs.org (925) 676-7543.

Contra Costa County Homeless Shelter Listing: http://www.shelterlistings.org/county/ca-contra_costa-county.html

The Contra Costa County Health Services, Homeless Program: <https://cchealth.org/homeless/>